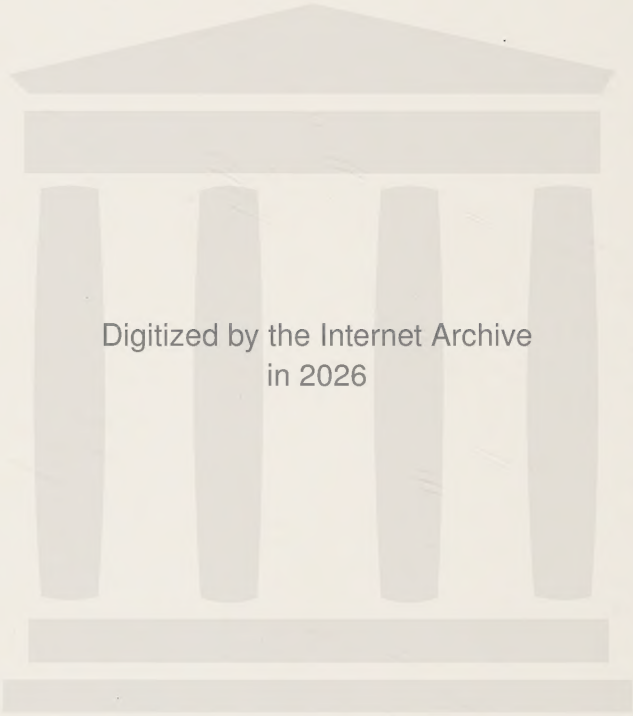
BRACCIANO

The Odescalchi Castle and its History

The Lake and its Surroundings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Marco Nobile

A New Guide to BRACCIANO

Orsini-Odescalchi Castle and its History

The Lake and its Surroundings

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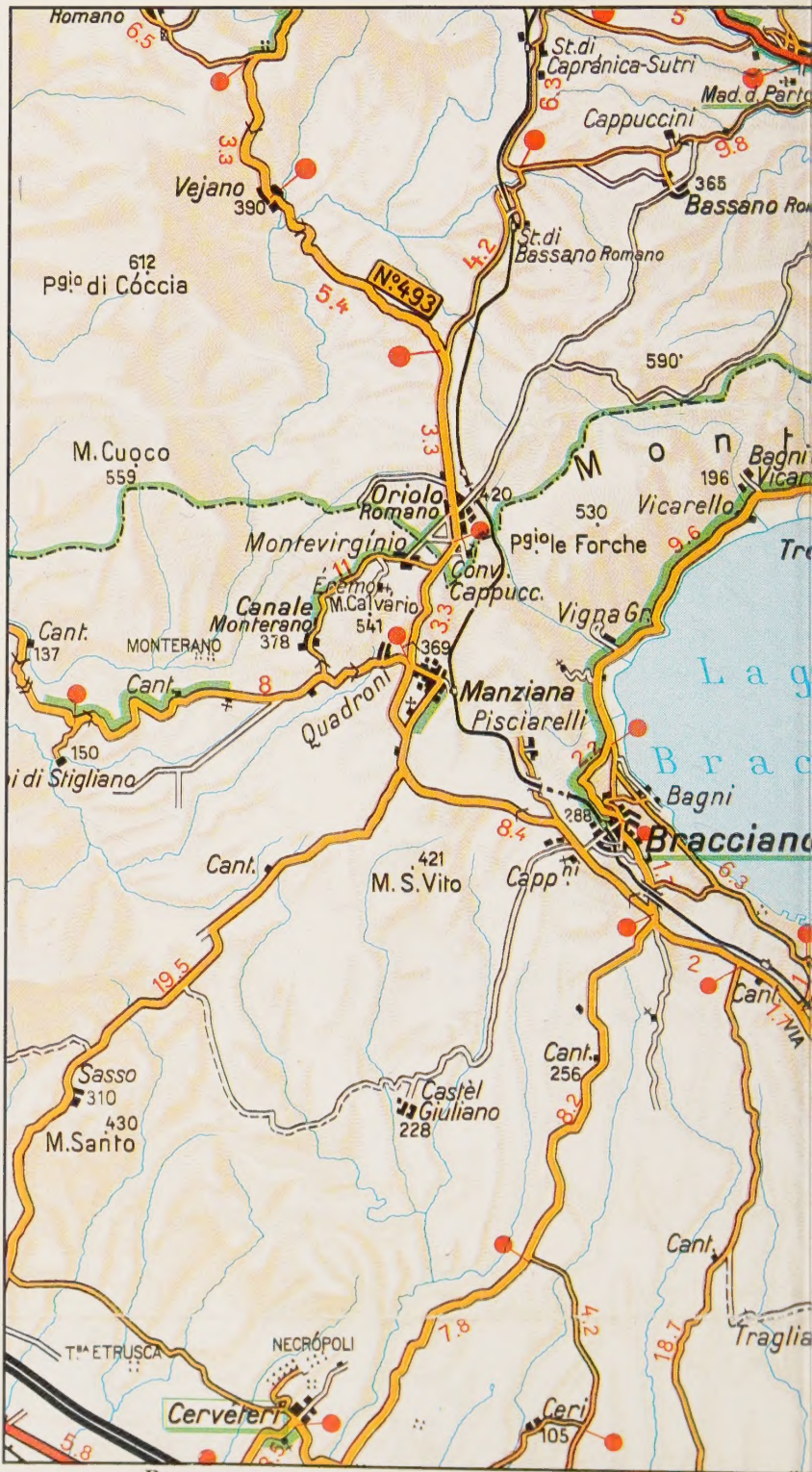
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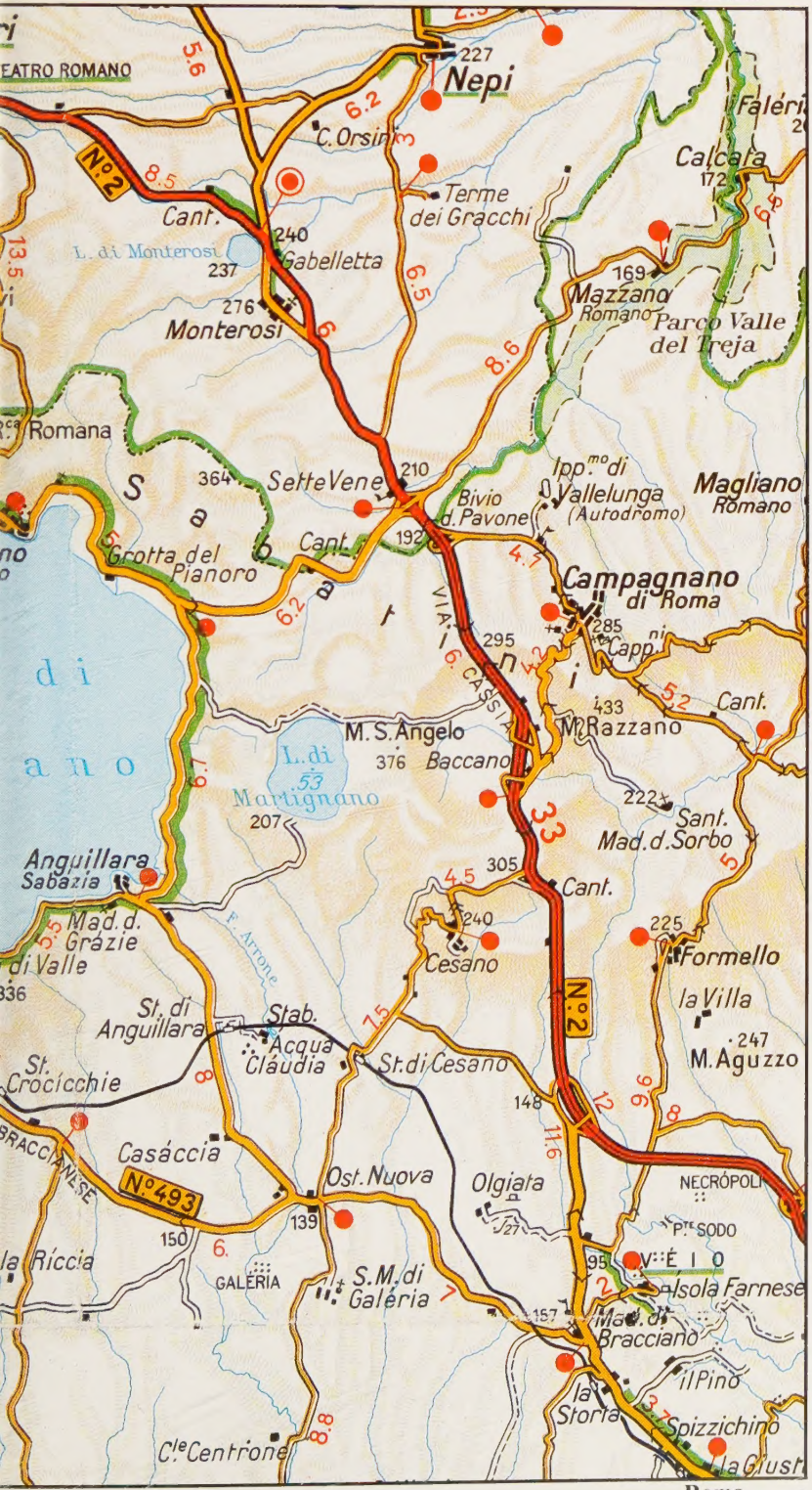
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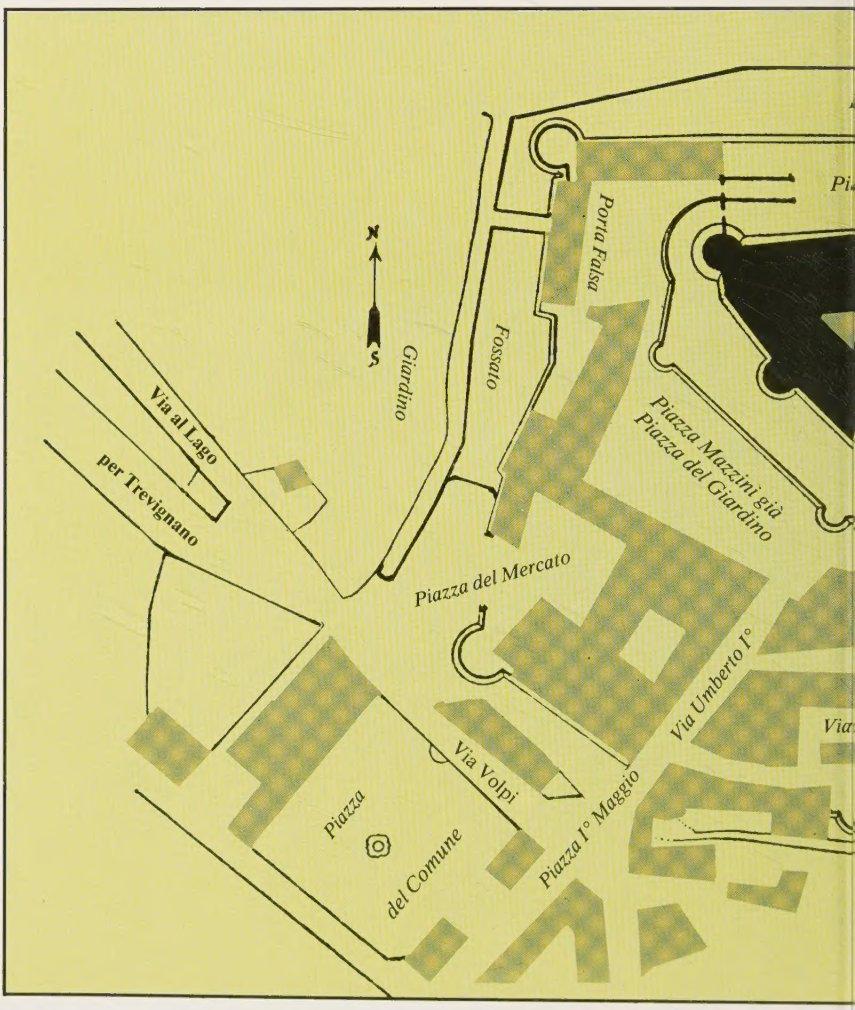
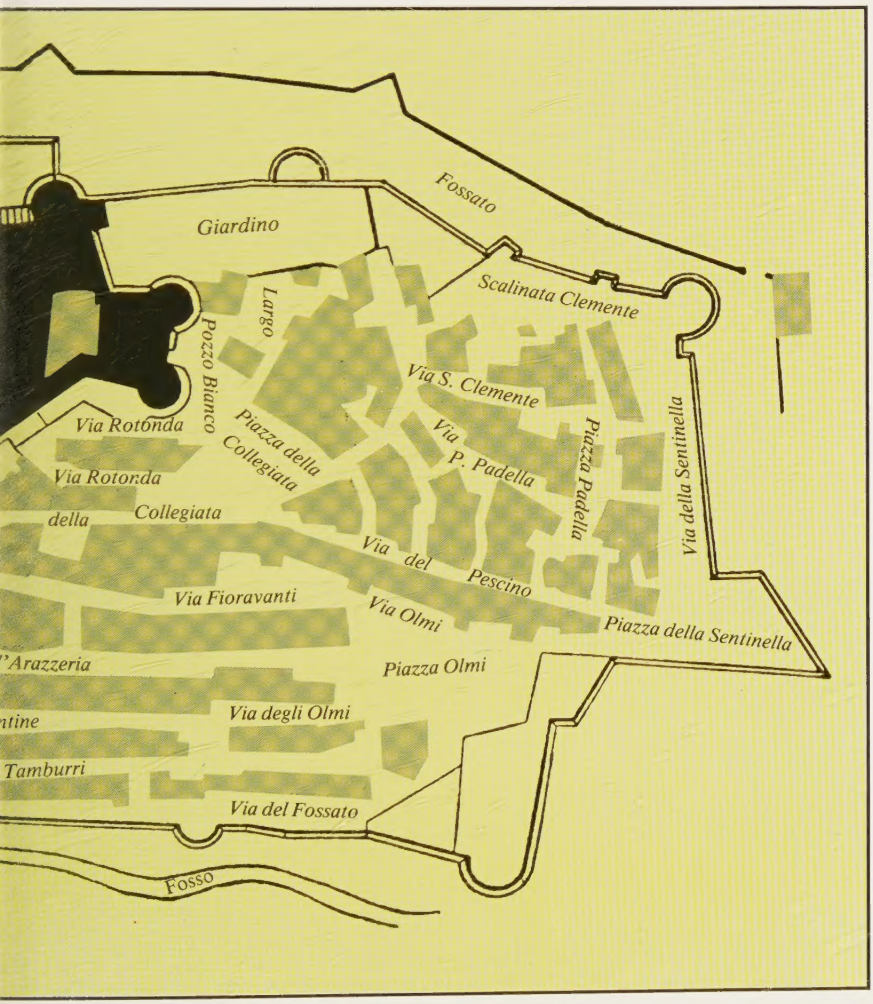
Map of the Mediaeval centre of Bracciano with Orsi



Odescalchi Castle and the various fortified boundary walls



Bracciano

The town of Bracciano is visited annually by thousands of tourists from all over Italy and abroad, especially in the summer months owing to its pleasant position. It has a very mild climate the whole year round on account of its hilly location (288 metres above sea level).

The waters of the volcanically formed lake fill the hollows of two craters: the larger one towards Bracciano dates to a distant prehistoric era, as testify findings of pile-dwelling remains in the region of Vicarello, near Trevignano Romano.

The lake is surrounded by beautiful, verdant woods and skirting the entire perimeter is a coastal road, the "circumlacuale", which directly links the three lakeside towns of Bracciano, Anguillara and Trevignano. This tour can also be done by boat: "Sabazia II", a modern craft owned by the Bracciano Lake Consortium, does regular trips taking in the three aforementioned towns.

There is an incredible variety of fish here, making it a fisherman's paradise: the waters are abundant in pike, tench, whitefish, perch, eel and frogs.

Savage and splendid, the thickly-wooded hills of the Bracciano district are inhabited by Maremma horses and cattle, which are bred in the wild. Here, where the luxuriant banks give way to woods, we can see wildboar, fox, pheasant, moorhen, as well as thrush, grey partridge and quail. As we leave the wooded regions, in a bay East of Trevignano we can meet a colony of nutria that must have escaped from a fur farm. Also fugitive minks are to be seen along the banks and reeds.

Tracts of riparian forest thrive, immune to the deteriorating environment, rich in alders, willows, poplars and wide expanses of oak trees. Beyond this, woods of turkey-oaks, chestnut and hornbeam trees can also be viewed on Mount Rocca Romana.

A large, efficient sports organisation serves the entire area of Lake Bracciano, while other structures guarantee services such as boat rental, dock and shed facilities, bathing establishments, small hotels and shops sellings all kinds of merchandise for everyday life and lake activities. There is a yacht club with a surfing centre recognised by the Italian Yachting Federation.

Famous restaurants overlook the lake whose excellent cuisine, with local fruit and vegetable produce and fresh fish from the lake, is rightly considered one of the vaunts of Lake Bracciano.

Six, well-organised camping sites situated among the woods covering the hills, offer nature lovers the opportunity to spend some truly unforgettable days.

Bracciano's importance as a tourist locality doesn't only stem from the lake itself, but also from its nearness to Rome and the few kilometres separating it from the beaches of the Tyrrhenian Sea: Fregene, Passo Scuro, Marina di Palo, Ladispoli, the recent Marina di Cerveteri and the new tourist port of Civitavecchia. However, its major attraction remains Orsini-Odescalchi Castle, which stands mighty and dominating over Bracciano and the whole lake.

Today, the town has a population of about fifteen thousand, plus four thousand soldiers who occupy the Enrico Cosenz Barracks and the Montefinale Artillery School.

Let's begin our tour from Piazza 1° Maggio, the town's main

square and starting point of all the roads for touring the town and its surroundings. One road leads to the lake and from here to Anguillara, Vigna di Valle with its Airforce Museum; the other leads to the ancient Vicarello Thermal Springs and to Trevignano; still another goes in the direction of the Viterbo region taking in Manziano and Oriolo; finally, the most important one, the State road leading to Rome.

We shall examine the Mediaeval village only, since it offers the main attraction for its historical and artistic value. Up to the late 19th Century, Piazza 1° Maggio was called "Piazza del Ponte" from its original function: in fact, this can be deduced from a 16th Century fresco by the Zuccari brothers existing in the castle, which depicts an embattled drawbridge in place of the square. So, in times of war, the village and castle were isolated from the surrounding countryside. The walls encircled the whole village and the curtain portions were guarded at the corners by towers standing adjacent to the moat. The ancient course of the moat can be viewed from Piazza 1° Maggio facing in the direction of the Mediaeval village. On our left, we can also see the fortified walls with the 15th Century towers still bearing the embrasures for defence purposes.

Going along Via Umberto I, immediately on the right you come to the little Church of the Misericordia, at present desecrated: this was the first construction to be erected in the moat. Instead, on the left you find the Parish Church of Bracciano, Santa Maria Novella, the work of Cardinal Giordano Orsini and founded by the Augustinians in 1449.

Panorama of Bracciano

A plaque attesting this origin still exists today. You can admire the cloister adjacent to the church, which belonged to the Augustinian Friars until not long ago. The court with its four porticos has a storied well in the centre flanked by two architraved peperino columns bearing the Orsini coat of arms and Augustinian symbols.

A short distance away from Piazza 1° Maggio, along the road to the lake, you can view the Church of Santa Maria del Riposo with its chapel bearing frescos, done by Roman artists towards the end of the 16th Century, showing cycles dedicated to the Madonna and episodes from the New Testament.

We now return to Piazza 1° Maggio.

Continuing along the right, you come to Via dell'Arazzaria, which is named after the old tapestry factory, "Arazzi", established for the first time by Paolo Giordano Orsini in the second half of the 16th Century. Nothing remains of this industry; today, just a few craftsmen are present in Via dell'Arazzaria doing canvas paintings, clay modelling and restoration work.

The street then brings you to the Sentinella Belvedere, which offers a magnificent view of the lake.

From Sentinella you arrive at the Collegiate Church, which is situated in the highest part of the town. The origins of this church, consecrated to St. Stephen, date back to the 13th Century and, until a few years ago it used to be the town's Parish Church. However, it should be considered 16th Century because in that era

Via Principe di Napoli and Via Umberto I

The Town Square and Bracciano by night

it underwent extension work and acquired its present Latin-cross shape. The interior which comprises three aisles divided by pillars, isn't of particular architectural interest, whilst the chapel and vestry house some important works such as the two triptychs by Gregorio and Donato d'Arezzo (19th Century): one depicts the Redeemer between St. John the Baptist and St. Nicholas; the other the Virgin of the "Belt" between St. Stephen and St. Laurence.
The 16th Century baptismal font is an interesting feature. The same chapel houses a painting by Marotta depicting Jesus's Baptism and a canvas by Domenichino showing St. Irene of Portugal. The main altar-piece by the painter Richard (13th C.) depicts the Martyrdom of St. Stephen. However, this church is constantly closed to the public and special permission is needed from the Parish Priest of Bracciano in order to visit it.
Descending along Via della Collegiata, from Piazza della Collegiata in the direction of Piazza 1° Maggio, under a unique arch, you come to Piazza Mazzini and, just before this on the left on the corner of Via Fioravanti, you can view the old Mint founded by Paolo Giordano Orsini II in the early 1600s. Piazza Mazzini, once known as Piazza del Giardino, is rectangular in shape with the second boundary wall of the castle occupying its northeast side and Via Umberto I — once called Santa Maria Novella after the church of the same name — running along the southeast side. The southwest and northwest sides are flanked by houses belonging to the old fortified village, which form a corner with an arch (Via della Praterina) from where you can view the park and the fortified walls.

View of Bracciano seen from the new hospital

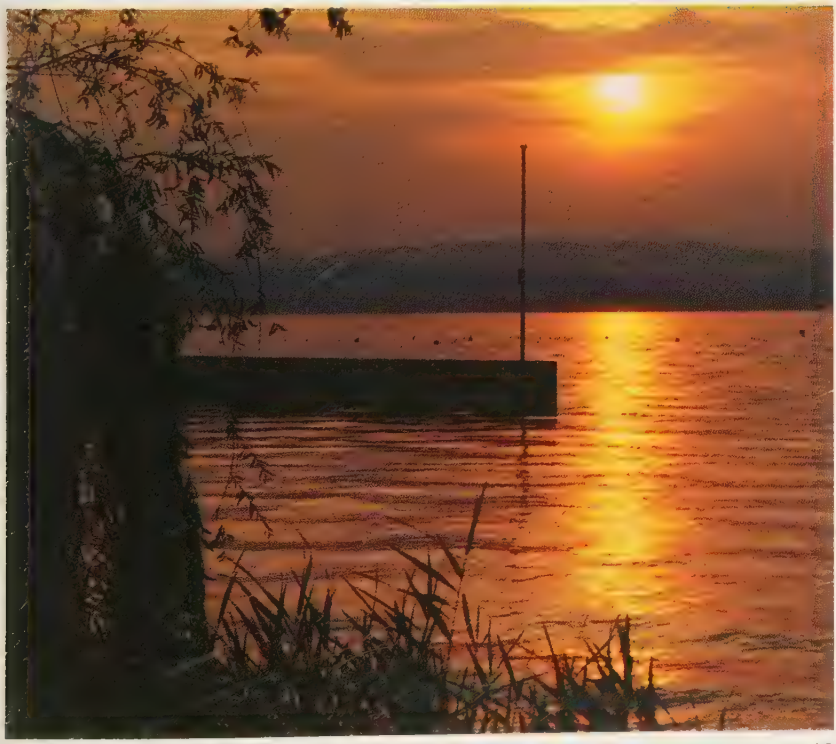
St. Stephen's Cathedral

Rooftops and houses of the Mediaeval centre

The area lying between the boundary walls and the houses, now used as a garden and market, was once the bottom of the moat that surrounded most part of the castle and village. The ticket office of Orsini-Odescalchi Castle is in the northwest wall and tours are held daily excepting Mondays. These conducted tours, by the castle staff, illustrate the castle's history, including the names of historical figures who resided in the numerous rooms.
The tours have the following timings: in Summer, from April 1st to September 30th, mornings at:
9/9.30/10.00/10.30/11.00/11.30/12.00/12.30 and afternoons at:
16.00/16.30/17.00/17.30/18.00/18.30/19.00/19.30. In Winter, from October 1st to March 31st, every Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at:
10.00/11.00/12.00/15.00/16.00/17.00. On Thursday and Saturday at:
10.00/10.30/11.00/11.20/11.30/12.00/12.30/15.00/15.30/
16.00/16.30/ 17.00/ 17.30. On Sunday at:
10.00/10.20/10.40/11.00/11.40/12.00/12.20/12.40/15.00/
15.20/15.40/16.00/16.20/16.40/17.00/17.20/17.40. The tour takes about an hour.
Piazza Mazzini is an ideal parking place for cars and coaches throughout the week, excepting Wednesday mornings when the market is held here. A characteristic stall at the castle entrance sells handcrafted souvenirs, as well as earthenware and local Etruscan art imitations.

The beach and pile-work of the open air restaurants

The beach and an impressive sunrise on the pier



Historical introduction to Bracciano

A few single or double-chambered tombs uncovered in the nearby site of Colonnette, testify that Bracciano was inhabited since Etruscan times. But the oldest, exact information to reach us about the Bracciano area, dates back to the 11th Century and, precisely, from Calisse who said: "In the 11th Century, a rather numerous branch of the Prefetti family dominated Tuscia and in the main towns of their estates were referred to as the Lords of Santa Pupa (now nearby Manziana) and Bracciano." However, the oldest document dates to January 10th, 1234, drawn up in "castro Brachiani, in platea ante domus Orsuli de Porta", by which the boundaries of Bracciano and Santa Pupa were delimited.

In this document, the name of the old village was Brachianum, but prior to this, it is believed to have been called Porcianum, on account of its pig-breeding farms. Over the centuries, this name changed many times from Brazanum to Brasanum and then Barceinum, but in each case the meaning of arm was maintained, so that today, the town's coat of arms shows an arm outstretched as if in offering and between the fingers of the right hand is a rose, symbol of the Orsini family.

Moreover, from this document of Calisse you can deduce that the lords of Bracciano were the Prefetti of Vico, a very influential family with estates in the Orvieto and Viterbo regions.

But the Orsini's name appeared in 1191-1198 with Pope Celestini III, whose real name was Giacinto Robo' Orsini. Therefore, the Orsinis were already quite powerful at the time and ill-famed for their cruelty and murders — common among the great families of that era. Soon, the two families quarrelled over Orso Orsini, the Podesta' of Viterbo. The Viterbo people were discontented with the Podesta's conduct and drove him out; the Orsinis then attacked Viterbo which was defended by the Prefetti of Vico.

In 1285, Onorio IV became Pope and put an end to the family quarrel. The Orsinis were intent on having Bracciano but didn't conclude anything and on the 2nd September 1378, the antipope Clemente VII donated some land including the "castrum Porciani" to the brothers, Giovanni and Poncello Orsini. But this donation did not have any follow up due to the donor's inconsistency and the power of the Prefettis.

14th Century documents show that Bracciano consumed 18 rubbia — old unit of measure — of salt per six months, enabling us to calculate that the inhabitants numbered roughly 1,500. These people lived mainly by fishing and stock-raising with a small trade with the other centres along the lake: Anguillara, Trevignano, S. Liberato, S. Vito and Pisciarelli. With the Orsini's arrival in Bracciano, these folk became men at arms.

Very little is known about Bracciano in the 1300s. In 1375, the Rome Commune seized Bracciano and then it was reconquered by the Prefetti of Vico aided by men at arms: in 1380, Bracciano returned once again under Rome. A ransom of 5,000 florins, less 29 florins in favour of Latino Orsini, paid by the Rome Commune is said to date to that year. The exact year of the Orsini's arrival in

Bracciano cannot be determined, however the date does coincide with the donation made by Pope Martino V (Oddone Colonna), who took office on the 1st September 1419, in favour of Carlo Francesco and Orsino Orsini. Thus the Orsinis became owners of all the estates, including Bracciano, continuously acquiring small areas, as revealed by a few bills of sale existing in the Orsini archives. Furthermore, in 1427, Panalfuccio Guidarelli sold the Orsinis all the rights to the waters of Bracciano; the same occurred in 1428. In 1433, the Orsini brothers donated everything to Cardinal Giordano Orsini, who founded the Augustinian monastery in 1449. The Orsini's coming to Bracciano is, therefore, the doing of Martino V, a member of the Colonna family and enemies both in the past and eternally of the Orsinis. Out of the two brothers, only Carlo acted as lord in Bracciano from the Prefetti stronghold, at that time inadequate. He acquired fame as a great "condottiere" and reunited for himself all the various estates purchased previously. On account of their skills, his four sons were nicknamed the four Orsini musketeers: Napoleone, Roberto, Giovanni and Latino. Out of the four, only Napoleon devoted himself with distinction to Bracciano, as we shall see, together with his son. Giovanni was the Archbishop of Trani and Latino had a very important pontifical career, thanks to his important role in the elections of Francesco della Rovere as pope, officially named Sixtus IV. Instead, Roberto was Chief Constable of the Kingdom of Naples and his daughter Alfonsina's descendants were among others Catherine de' Medici, the Queen of France, Francis II, Charles IX, the King of France and Queen Elizabeth of Spain.
His brother Napoleon, Count of Tagliacozza, and of no lesser importance having married Francesca Orsini of Monterotondo, the sister of Clarice who was Lorenzo the Magnificent's wife, could depend on his brother Latino for support from the Vatican. It was actually Napoleone Orsini who ordered construction work to begin on the massive castle in 1470, availing not only of his own considerable experience as a man at arms, but also of the expert advice of the architects Giacomo di Pietrasanta, Meo del Caprino and Giovanni de' Dolci.

Very little information, worthy of mention here, exists on the life of Napoleone, whilst his son, Gentil Virginio, lived a much more eventful life.
Even though over the centuries all the lords of Bracciano have been outstanding figures in the events concerning Roman history and especially that of Bracciano, particular attention should be paid to Gentil Virginio Orsini. Valletta and Pannunzi, the latest historians to study his life in relation to Bracciano's history, or to the period of 15th Century history — so dense with events as we shall later see — define him respectively: "Gentil Virginio was good at exploiting the events of his life to his own benefits; he had a reputation for his inconsistency not only towards himself but also with respect to others. He was a great lord outwardly only, lacking in real virtues and inner qualities. Whoever suggested that Gentil Virginio was a great captain didn't know that he wasn't of that stuff and the reason he received military appointments of a certain standing was on account of his illustrious descendancy and his many, important connections."

Gentil Virginio showed himself to be endowed with sharp political and human insight, which enabled him to acquire a well-balanced sense of behaviour.
Many different opinions exist among historians as to the multiple aspects of Gentil Virginio's personality. On this subject, however, various facts should be considered, such as the extremely dissimilar diplomatic situations, the continuously changing front and the precarious alliances, which pervaded that period of history spanning the entire 15th Century, especially in Rome. It's also necessary to mention the power achieved by the Orsini family under Gentil Virginio's barony; together with the Colonnas, the latter did what he pleased in Rome, Lazio and, indirectly, in Bracciano, it being the capital of the feud with the Orsinis who in that era (1470-1494) were at the height of their territorial expansion. In fact, in 1492, following the sale of a few territories by Franceschetto Cibo, the son of Pope Innocent VIII, to Gentil Virginio, the feud included the counties of Tagliacozzo, Alba and Carsoli in the Kingdom of Naples, the Sabatina region comprising Anguillara, Trevignano, Vicarello and Bracciano, the feuds of Cerveteri, Monteromano, Viano, Rota, Ischia and the coast from Palo to Santa Marinella; as well as estates in Sabina and Tucsia.
It was practically one of the greatest feuds of both the Church and the Kingdom of Naples.
These insights enable us to understand rather well the continuous changes of front performed by Gentil Virginio during his very hard life, which, as we shall later see, ended in such an undignified way.

Gentil Virginio was the only son of Napoleone Orsini and Francesca Orsini of Monterotondo; he married Isabella, the daughter of Raimondo Orsini, Prince of Salerno and Eleonora d'Aragona, thus strengthening his connections with the Court of Naples, where he spent his early career fighting under the flag of King Ferrante (King of Naples). From 1477, despite all his moving he established his residence in Rome and then in Bracciano, in order to direct personally the construction work of Bracciano Castle, which had been begun by his father Napoleone before his death in 1480.

This date is certain because numerous documents testify the presence of Pope Sixtus IV, who came to Bracciano to escape the plague that was raging in Rome in 1481 and stayed on for a good two months. Two rooms still known today as the "Papal Chamber and Study", were prepared for his arrival. Gentil Virginio's personality was, therefore, already quite renowned and he forcefully wormed his way into all the important events of the moment. Gentil Virginio found himself practically heading the Guelph faction in Rome in opposition to the Colonnas, leaders of the Ghibelline party; he was also a close relative of Lorenzo de' Medici, the enemy of both the Pope and King Ferrante, also closely linked with Gentil Virginio, and in this diplomatic plot he managed to extricate himself excellently without stirring up the hatred of anyone.

Very soon, the enmity between the Orsinis and the Colonnas was rekindled: the former allying with the Pope and the Venetian troops, under the command of Roberto Malatesta and Gerolamo Riario; the latter Colonnas being allies of King Ferrante and Ercole d'Este, Duke of Ferrara. In spite of the intervention of Pope Sixtus IV to negotiate peace, the fighting ended in the partial destruction of the Colonna family.

As mentioned previously, Gentil Virginio had married Isabella Orsini of Salerno, a close relative of King Ferrante. Upon the death of Pope Sixtus IV, Gentil Virginio changed sides again, serving with the colours of the Aragonas and being appointed by King Ferrante as the Commander of the Aragon troops. This event is narrated by Valletta as follows: "Taking over office and the relative ensigns gave him the opportunity to put himself on show and he organized a grand ceremony on the 20th October 1489, where he posed on horseback sumptuously dressed, followed by pages, knights and infantry in lavish costumes. His megalomania was such that he ordered an edict to be circulated, wherein free board and lodging were offered to all willing to attend the ceremony. He also demanded that the entire scenic display, made especially to order, be passed on to those absent and to posterity and he commissioned a fresco to be done in the castle by Antoniazzo Romano."

The castle viewed from Piazza Mazzini

The next to succeed the Papal throne was Cardinal Cibo, called Pope Innocent VIII, the uncle of Franceschetto who sold some lands to Gentil Virginio. This new pontificate too saw a new series of alliances, conspiracies and wars, bringing the Orsinis against the Colonnas. While Cardinal Della Rovere — another family envious of Gentil Virginio's power — stirred up a reprisal in Rome, Gentil Virginio camped at Vicovaro received reinforcements from King Ferrante and his brother-in-law the King of Hungary, Gian Galeazzo Sforza, the Duke of Calabria and from Florence. However, despite this aid he was unable to attack Rome; rather, he was forced to retreat and on the 11th August 1486 signed a peace treaty that wasn't much of an honour.

On the 15th June 1487, Gentil Virginio brought about the marriage between his son Gian Giordano and King Ferrante's daughter Maria Cecilia d'Aragona. By this union, Gentil Virginio took over the Aragona coat of arms (one can be seen in the first, outer portal). This idyllic moment of peace between the families was followed by a period full of marriages: in fact, Franceschetto Cibo — "the Pope's son" — married Maddalena de' Medici, Gentil Virginio's niece. Here again, Gentil Virginio's greatness is passed on to posterity.
who came to Rome for this wedding (November 1487).
On the 20th June 1488, Piero de' Medici married Alfonsina, the daughter of Roberto Orsini and on the 15th September 1489, Gentil Virginio was appointed Captain General of the Neapolitan army.

At the death of the Pope, Cardinal Borgia succeeded under the name of Pope Alexander VI and in 1482, his relations with Gentil Virginio worsened on account of the latter's acquisition of some lands from Franceschetto Cibo.
As stated previously, this accumulation of wealth disturbed the balance of alliances existing and, moreover, represented a close threat to the Pope himself, who promptly declared the acquisition null. This time the Pope was supported by Venice, Ferrara, Mantua and Ludovico the Moor; while the Orsinis were backed by the Colonnas and the King of Naples, enemy of Ludovico the Moor, usurper of Galeazzo Sforza who was King Ferrante's brother-in-law.

The descent upon Italy by the French King, Charles VIII, was actually willed by the Pope and Ludovico the Moor to defeat the Orsinis, the King of Naples and the Aragonese. At first, the Pope tried to reach an agreement with Gentil Virginio and on the 15th August 1493, awarded the latter the much disputed feuds against payment of 40,000 scudos to the Apostolic Council.
To seal his friendship with the Kingdom of Naples, Gentil Virginio was appointed Chief Constable of the Kingdom, but Charles VIII descended all the same upon Italy to claim his succession rights to the throne, since King Alfonso had meanwhile succeeded King Ferrante.
Once again, Gentil Virginio abandoned the King of Naples, Ferrandino, who together with the Colonnas was conspiring to possess Orsini's feud and openly served under Charles VIII though,

at the time of the latter's defeat. Gentil Virginio and his son were captured at the fall of Atello and imprisoned in Castel dell'Ovo.

The victorious Alexander VI immediately seized the opportunity and excommunicated Gentil Virginio on the 2nd September 1496, at the same time attacking his feud defended by Bartolomea Orsini and her husband Bartolomeo d'Alviano.
Commanding the Papal expedition were the Duke of Candia, Don Giovanni Borgia and Fabrizio Colonna. They easily conquered Galeria, Sutri, Bassano, Campagnano, Cesano and Anguillara; Trevignano and Bracciano put up some resistance only to capitulate later. The Bracciano folk, together with the exiles from Trevignano, were the only ones to defend Gentil Virginio's rights.
Here is Valletta's description of the siege of Bracciano: "The role of defending the town and castle was assumed by Bartolomeo d'Alviano, who had escaped from the Neapolitan prison. He was both morally and materially supported by his wife Bartolomea Orsini, Gentil Virginio's daughter, who took up arms and actively fought, resolving numerous cruel onslaughts thanks to her valour and cunning. Husband and wife together strengthened the village and castle by erecting a strong rampart in front of the fortified walls. This still exists and is called "La Sentinella".

Friends and partisans of the Orsinis from Lazio and all over Italy, came to the couple's aid and, as written by Sansovino, formed a "rather tremendous military corps" that battled right up to Monte Mario and almost made prisoner Cardinal Cesare Borgia who was hunting in the vicinity and who managed to escape.
The day Giovanni Borgia tried to make the defenders desert by promising them higher wages if they joined his ranks, a donkey was sent outside the town walls of Bracciano in the direction of the camp gonfalonier and around its neck hung a placard with a couplet of halting-lines but quite effective in meaning. In the end, Bartolomeo d'Alviano and Bartolomea Orsini came off best, thanks to Carlo Orsini and Vitellozzo Vitelli, who arrived from Cerveteri and defeated the Papal troops at Soriano on the 24th January 1497.

The Duke of Urbino, Gian Piero Gonzaga was made prisoner, the Duke of Candia was injured and the Papal legate together with Fabrizio Colonna fled to Ronciglione.
A bronze plaque still exists in the castle to commemorate the victorious feats of the Battle of Soriano.
Gentil Virginio could neither exploit nor rejoice at this victory because six day's prior to it he died from poisoning in his Neapolitan prison.
Gentil Virginio was succeeded by his son Gian Giordano, a man of honour and military valour and yet, one who hated that conformist era. He was extravagant, a megalomaniac yet morally dutiful, and as General of the French Army, he accompanied Cesare Borgia to France to deliver a Papal Bull annulling the marriage between Charles VIII's son, Louis XII with the daughter of Louis XI.

His first marriage was to Maria Cecilia d'Aragona — which gave him the right to add the Aragona coat of arms to that of his family — who bore him a son, Napoleone. The Orsini's inheritance was passed on to the third son Francesco. Napoleone in fact, who was the eldest, was assassinated by his stepbrother Gerolamo near Frattocchie on the 17th February 1534. Although the latter availed of the influence of Popes Leon X, Hadrian IV and Clement VII, he was convicted even as a fugitive.
Francesco, inheritor of the Orsini's wealth equally with his mother, Donna Felice, was renowned for his arrogance, violations, murders and criminal deeds of all kinds.
Later on, Pope Paul III banished Francesco Orsini and, instead, pardoned Gerolamo who was engaged to his niece Francesca Sforza of Santa Fiora. Two children were borne from this marriage: Paolo Giordano I, who inherited the family fortune, and Felice who, in 1552, married Marcantonio Colonna, the conqueror of Lepanto.

In 1560, Paolo Giordano married Isabella de' Medici, the second-eldest daughter of Cosimo de' Medici. At the same time, Pope Pius IV, a relative of Isabella, raised the Bracciano feud to duchy comprising Campagnano, Anguillara, Galeria, Sacrofano, Trevignano, Monterano, Cantalupo, S. Gregorio and Saracinesco.
This is Borsari's description of Paolo Giordano I: "Paolo Giordano I ordered quite a number of works to be carried out in the castle in honour of Isabella, and a huge suite was prepared whose lavishness is still be to seen in the rich decorations of the rooms; the Medici coat of arms is included in that of the Orsinis."
Taddeo and Federico Zuccari participated in these works. Paolo Giordano not only saw to Bracciano's enlargement and prosperity but also took care to adorning it with beautiful buildings; besides adding new fortifications, which were necessary with the advent of new battle techniques and different types of artillery. The monastery of the Capuchin Friars was his doing; he set up the iron and sulphur works and the tapestry industry and also saw to the development of typography.
Paolo Giordano I was suffering from a sore and a wound in his leg, which happened in battle in 1565 and 1570, while commanding the Papal troops against the Turks.
Although he greatly desired his beautiful wife Isabella — who was renowned for her many lovers — Paolo Giordano was also attracted by the beauty of Vittoria Accoramboni, who was staying at Bracciano Castle. Beautiful Vittoria, who had married a certain Francesco Peretti, the nephew of the Cardinal of Montalto — who later became Pope Sixtus V — in agreement with her brother Marcello, had her husband killed. News of this affair soon became public, nevertheless Paolo Giordano still wanted to marry her.
On the 12th June 1584, an illustrious guest came to Bracciano, namely Marcantonio Colonna the conqueror of Lepanto, Chief Constable and Viceroy of Sicily and brother-in-law of Paolo Giordano I. The latter entertained his guest and entourage of 400 men with much unwonted pomp and the stay in the castle lasted a total of eleven days.

Later, Paolo Giordano I fled and died from his leg wound in Salo' towards the end of 1585. Vittoria was killed by Ludovico Orsini because she refused to return the family jewels, while Marcello was in turn killed by the same friars whom he had asked refuge. However, the people of Bracciano have a legend about Isabella, even though she had spent most of her life in Florence, and it narrates how she seduced young men and then made them fall into a trap situated in a vestibule near her bedroom. A novel too, was written about her entitled "Isabella Orsini" and published in 1850. Subsequently, the title of Duke of Bracciano passed on to the legitimate firstborn, Virginio II; the latter lived a rather extravagant life and greatly impaired the Orsini's already precarious situation. He spent 200,000 scudos in an expedition to Hungary and returned with a maimed hand; he had connections with Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth of England; and he accompanied to France his cousin Maria de' Medici, the bride-to-be of King Henry IV.
Just 17 years old, in 1589 to be precise, Virginio II married for the first time Flavia Domasceni Peretti, the virtuous niece of Sixtus V who we already mentioned. It was a marriage of interest and love which marked the reconciliation between the Orsinis and Perettis. Eleven children were borne from this marriage: five became friars; Virginio, the second-eldest donated Montevirginio — the area named after him — to his ecclesiastical order.

An idyllic scene of the lake, with Mount Rocca Romana near Trevignano in the background

In 1668, a monastery was erected in that locality lying between Manziana and Canale Monterano; to this day, a plaque exists in memory of the event. Prior to his death, Virginio II ordered the building of the nuns' convent and the walls running below the castle; he also had connections with Tasso.
Strangely so, he died a natural death in 1615.
Paolo Giordano II then became Duke of Bracciano. He was a lover of literature and composed numerous works, among which a tragedy entitled "Sant'Agnese". In his youth he travelled extensively in Italy and abroad, but later in life most of his time was dedicated to Bracciano.
Paolo Giordano II tried to improve Bracciano's economical standing and decided to choose a rich rather than beautiful wife. His choice was Isabella Appiani, the Princess of Piombino, who appeared to be very rich with estates in Genoa, Pescia and Bagni di Lucca apart from owning Piombino, Populonia and the surrounding lands, the Isle of Elba excluding Portoferraio, and a vast sum of money deposited in Naples, the main share of an iron works in Piombino. Unfortunately, this wealth proved only to be on paper and Paolo Giordano II realised this only after the marriage; besides, he was already burdened with six children. The wedding took place in 1621 celebrated by Pope Paul V, the same pope who brought Lake Bracciano's waters to the fountain at Gianicolo.

An impressive sunset

Picturesque scene of the lake in Spring

In 1625, Emperor Ferdinand transformed the Duchy of Bracciano into a Principality and Paolo Giordano II was made Prince of the Holy Roman Empire. In 1629, the same emperor approved the making of gold, silver and bronze coins in the principality and a mint was constructed. Furthermore, Paolo Giordano II produced cannon-balls for the Papal State, using the iron from Piombino, gunpowder for the Neapolitans, and increased the production of wool. He reclaimed many areas along the banks of the lake, established a fish farm for choice breeds and constructed an aqueduct bringing drinking water to Bracciano, which was still in use until 1967.

He died in 1656 after an intense civilian life, leaving others to deal with the military problems. His wife died in 1666 without bearing him any children.

The principality passed into the hands of Ferdinando Orsini, then the Duke of Sangemini, younger brother of Paolo Giordano II. Another marriage of convenience was needed and Flavio di Ferdinando, the second son, had to marry a lady in her forties with a daughter and, what's more, already a grandmother. Her name was Ippolita Ludovisi, the niece of Pope Gregory XV and widow of Prince Aldobrandini, the nephew of Clement VII.

Faced with the way things were going, the eldest son Virginio very cleverly decided to don the scarlet.
In the meantime, all the luxury and excessive pomp enjoyed by the Orsinis, together with the heavy expenses for the upkeep of the principality that extended from Marina di Palo right upto the Viterbo region, accelerated the family's decline; signs of this had already begun to show at the time of Paolo Giordano II. As a result, Flavio, who was the Duke of Bracciano and the last of the Orsinis, had no choice but to part with the entire duchy. At that time, the Odescalchis and Chigis were very rich: the Odescalchis took Bracciano, deliberated by verbal auction by the Assembly of Barons on the 16th August 1696 in favour of Prince Livio I, for

The castle viewed from Porta Falsa

the sum of 386,300 scudos.
The deed of acquisition was stipulated by Duke Don Livio with Monsignor Treasurer on the 1st September of the same year (Borsari).
During the French occupation, Bracciano was taken without any resistance and as a mark of recognition a few cannon shots were fired from the hill of the Capuchins; traces of which can still be seen in the castle towers.
The Odescalchis held on to this feud for a good century, then it was sold for 400,000 scudos to Marquis Don Giovanni Torlonio, according to the deeds drawn up by Notary G.B. Sacchi, on the 15th March 1803 but "con jus redimendi".

In fact, on the 2nd December 1848, Notary Bartoli issued a deed whereby Duke Don Marino Torlonio agreed the feud be given back to Prince Don Livio Odescalchi for the same sum of 400,000 scudos.

On the 1st July 1861, another deed was drawn up by the aforementioned Don Livio III, in payment of the Duchy of Bracciano, the County of Pisciarelli and the Principality of Bracciano in favour of his wife, Countess Donna Sofia Braniscka (Branica for some), Princess Odescalchi, for the sum of 778,618 scudos.

Upon the Princess Mother's death, the properties were inherited by the first-born Prince Don Baldassarre, all but Bassano, which went to his brother Prince Don Ladislao. Out of all the family, Don Baldassarre was the only member to take an interest in the castle, bringing many of its features back to their original splendour. He died in Civitavecchia in 1909.

His first-born, Innocenzo Odescalchi, succeeded him and fathered six children. Innocenzo died in 1952 at the age of 64 and from then onwards Don Livio Odescalchi IV has inherited the castle, tending commendably to its upkeep and preservation and trying to revalue the objects contained therein, the actual construction and the current image both for tourism and in the name of art. He has carried out various restorations on the interior and exterior of the building and also opened the castle to the public so that its beauty may be viewed by one and all.

In 1956, Don Livio IV married Nobil Donna Anna Maria Vignarelli of Piobbico and on the 8th November 1970, their daughter Princess Maria Pace Odescalchi was born. At the age of 18, a magnificent coming-of-age party was held to celebrate her debut into Roman noble society. She is the sole heir to the Odescalchi inheritance because Don Livio IV suddenly died on the 14th December 1981.

Visit to the Castle

The castle, which stands out from all the other architecture on account of its typical shape, was erected in the Middle Ages and served as a fort and residence of the feudal lords. These buildings erected during the era 12th to 15th Century, comprised three main elements: the boundary walls, keep and manor-house. The first two functioned as defence and security for the third.
Orsini Castle in Bracciano is a perfect, harmonious combination of all these qualities, differing only in its irregular plan that comprises two quadrilateral bodies joined to form a corner.
The castle stands on a height dominating a vast area of countryside on the East, West and South flanks and Lake Bracciano in the North. Prior to the castle, the Vico Fortress stood on the same site. Construction work began in 1470 by order of Napoleone Orsini who unfortunately died in 1480 without seeing the finished work. His son Gentil Virginio saw to the building's completion. The North side was finished first especially for Pope Sixtus V who stayed in it for a few months in 1478 and 1481. We are sure of this information because on the 1st January 1481, Antoniazzo Romano commenced painting work in the North side.
The castle is considered a true jewel of 15th Century military art, a period of transition from the Mediaeval fortress and austere baronial mansions, the most beautiful example of which remains Palazzo Venezia in Rome, built just a few years earlier.

The castle viewed from the South

We mentioned the castle's irregular-shaped plan comprising two quadrilaterals joined at the corner: one small, solid structure in the East (the old Vico Fortress); the other more spacious one in the West, being the extension ordered by Napoleone Orsini. The two bodies are joined via the courtyards below and the sentry parapets above. From an architectural point of view, the difference between the two bodies is still noticeable today. Ballistic machines, catapults and crossbows were fixed on the towers, with hinged wickets at alternate intervals that could be raised to allow shots to be fired. The parapet that was constructed jutting out from the barrage and resting on corbels and small arches, created sorts of perpendicular embrasures from where all kinds of projectiles were hurled at the assailants attempting to scale the castle.

Naturally, with time battle techniques were improved and, consequently, new methods of defence needed. To this purpose another fortified boundary wall exists, polygon-shaped and with circular ramparts armed with artillery to guard the moat in front. In times of peace, the moat was crossed by way of a drawbridge that once occupied the site where Piazza 1° Maggio is at present.
This second boundary wall was ordered by Paolo Giordano I, whilst Bartolomeo d'Alviano saw to the construction of the Sentinella bulwark, in occasion of the war against Alexander VI.
At the northwest corner of Piazza Mazzini, once called Piazza del Giardino, we find the main entrance to the castle and the starting point of our visit.

Beyond the gate we go along an avenue flanked on the right by the first boundary wall, constructed by Gentil Virginio to form a roof-garden. This work was done with the help of the Trevignano townfolk, who rendered their services instead of paying the taxes. On the left is an extension of the buildings in Piazza Mazzini and serves as the porter's lodge and administrative office. Still on this side, a wide area bordered by a wall encloses an arch overlooking a gate called Porta Falsa — False Gate (the old entrance apart from the drawbridge). Below this arch we can view a stone bridge under which the moat ran beyond the second boundary walls. Therefore, we are now situated between the two fortifications, the second one being the work of Paolo Giordano Orsini.

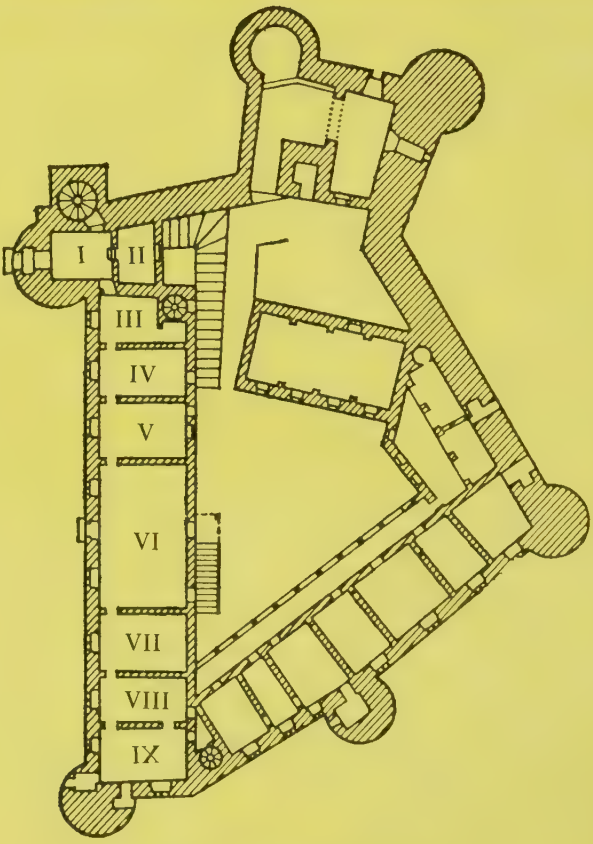
Leaving Porta Falsa and skirting the first boundary wall, we first see a majestic arch comprising two levels: the first one used to act as a stable and the second, a ravelin fortification to defend the lake side of the castle. Standing out in the majestic arch that dominates the avenue leading into the garden and right up to the actual entrance of the castle are ten roses of the Orsinis, all done in relief, together with the family's coat of arms in the form of a keystone flanked by the inscription "P. IORDANUS URS D'ARAGONA", in memory of the kinship with the King of Naples. At the sides, two splayed embrasures can be noted.

Beyond the mighty door, we enter a large square that offers a magnificent view of both the lake and the Sabatini Mountains. Beneath the tower lies the castle entrance, which originally served as a ravelin fortification and goods' entrance and is composed of two Ionic pillars, jambs and ashlar-archivolt covering the ancient portal. Paolo Giordano had inscribed on the latter the unique Latin inscription meaning "Napoleone of the Orsinis, Captain of the Church, my Founder, I repel offenders, I defend the good".

Once inside, we find a space within the tower: on our right lies a door then a small open space, a staircase with the "Mother Bear" symbol of the Orsinis on its right side, a small door with a winding staircase and a cistern. The big door on the right leads to a series of large rooms with vaulted ceilings, illuminated only on one side by a series of small, rectangular windows. These rooms are situated below the courtyard level and are partly dug out of the rock. This tunnel ends in a little grotto with a hole in the ground, which must have been made solely to collect rain water and, which corresponds with the other hole in the castle courtyard. However, apart from this, it could have served some other purpose. In fact, the previously mentioned hole in the ground — now closed in — opened out exactly underneath the corridor linking the Castle's two wings. Legend, hearsay, coincidence and assumptions all lead us to seriously consider this tunnel to be that inevitable trap existing in all castles of certain repute.

The Orsini inventory dated 1543, records that the abovementioned rooms were used for storing arms and ammunition and contained muskets, harquebuses and relative parts, iron pikes, falconets, German pikes, Brescia harquebuses, breastplates, crownpieces for horses, implements for making gunpowder, colophony and coal. Also, there were garrison and guard troops. Today, these rooms lie empty and are thus not visited.
In the entrance hall of the castle, a wide staircase leads up with a herringbone pattern flooring and on its right side the "Mother Bear" coat of arms. We shall come across another staircase in the castle courtyard that leads to the second floor. Furthermore, there is a cistern of basaltic rock that should have sculptured on it the insignia of St. James of Compostella. According to an inventory dated 1526, between the cistern and the entrance door stood a guard house containing a few arms, oil lamps and lanterns though today there is no trace of it, making us presume that it has been walled up.

Now we go up along the brick ramp to the upper floor. Until not so long ago, there was a large fresco along the right wall, measuring 11 metres by 3.90 metres. It was done by Antoniazzo Romano, the pupil of Melozzo of Forli'. A letter of the painter exists addressed to Gentil Virginio Orsini, wherein he requests the scaffolding to be prepared in the room and the arch of the castle so as to avoid wasting his helpers' time.



Orsini-Odescalchi Castle
Map of the 1st Floor

This huge fresco commemorates two important events in the life of Gentil Virginio Orsini: the first shows his capture of the Aragonese troops in Bracciano; the second one illustrates Piero de' Medici accompanied by his mother paying a visit to his uncle in Bracciano Castle.

This area was transformed into a chapel during the dominion of the Torlonia family, but the Odescalchis rendered it its original beauty. Today, this fresco is kept in one of the inner rooms.
The arch leads us to the odd, triangular-shaped courtyard. The main flank has a double row of porticos with brick arches resting on octagonal, stone pillars that are in turn surmounted with elegant capitals, each differing from the other and adorned with the Orsini coat of arms.

When the Odescalchis took over from the Torlonias, the portico was walled up and rooms were created out of it. Prince Don Baldassarre Odescalchi's first concern was to carry out a thorough restoration and the job was commissioned to the architect R. Ojetti.
From the courtyard we go up via a wide, outer staircase to the floor of the State apartments. Underneath the portico, formed by two ramps of steps, stands the main door communicating with the first floor. The door jambs bear braided decorations and the architrave is sculptured with cornucopias interlaced with small palms. Lower down, there are two Cupids holding the shield with the Orsini coat of arms.

The State floor comprises sixteen rooms with furnishings dating from Gentil Virginio's time to that of Paolo Giordano I, approximately from 1491 to 1585.

This is the starting point of our visit to the State apartments.

The castle's Renaissance courtyard

Room 1 and 2 — Library and Study, also known as the "Papal Chamber"

It has been mentioned often in the historical introduction because Pope Sixtus IV stayed here in 1481, when Rome was in the throes of the plague and, also, because it was the first room in the castle, together with the study, to be completed. The Papal Chamber was built inside the tower and the thickness of the walls, which can be viewed on approaching the balcony, is the actual width of the tower walls.

The room's most outstanding feature is the ceiling frescoed by Taddeo and Federico Zuccari, 16th Century painters who did various decorative works in the castle at the time of Paolo Giordano I, especially in the private apartments of the present day owners.
Here is Borsari's description of this beautiful ceiling dating mid-16th Century: "The ceiling was done by the Zuccaris at the time of Paolo Giordano I and shows a series of squares and medallions decorated with white stucco figures in relief and pretty grotesque painting, all on a gilt background. Remarkable and worthy of mention are two medallions: one showing Muzio Scevola stretching his arm over the fire; and the other of Curzio falling into the chasm. Other medallions depict figures of satyrs, winged goddesses of victory and swans. The centre of the vault shows Phoebus in a quadriga chariot; and surrounding this are signs of the Zodiac, bears and roses belonging to the Orsini coat of arms.
The two libraries in this room were bought by the Odescalchis together with the rest of the castle furniture. However, they relate to different periods and have been placed in the rooms without any specific order. A few original pieces of the Orsini's furniture were kept in the castle until 1700, during which period the rooms were richly furnished by Prince Don Livio Odescalchi II.

Later, the French occupied Bracciano and the castle was stripped of its furniture and art works. The furniture was replaced only to be lost again by Don Livio III to the Torlonias, who sold everything to Cardinal De Falloux. Don Livio III and his wife Sofia Braniscka refurnished the castle with Parisian furniture and, at the Princess's death, everything was shared equally among the children. Once more the castle remained unfurnished. The first-born, Don Baldassarre Odescalchi (born in 1844) decided to restore the furniture that is now on display. Another room lies on the left, which was completed for the same purpose as the Papal Chamber together with two other rooms on the floor above directly overhead the Papal Chamber and Study, used as a kitchen and bathroom and entered by way of a spiral staircase.
Lastly, looking at the two lunettes we can observe the coat of arms of the Medicis and Orsinis; while the other decorations show Olympus gods namely Apollo, Mercury, Diana, Venus and Minerva, as well as a few landscapes. The ceiling's centre illustrates allegories of Peace and Victory and surrounding these are pairs of Nereids and Tritons.

Room 3 — known as Umberto I Room

So named in memory of its illustrious guest who slept here in 1900. This is the first room with an original lacunar-ceiling, thus dating to the castle's construction. As previously mentioned in the historical introduction, the original decoration work of the castle's North side was commissioned to Antoniazzo Romano and his 60 assistants a short while prior to the discovery of America, in the winter of 1491 to be exact. This ceiling, which is similar to that in five other rooms on the first floor, is adorned with the Orsini coat of arms (monogram, rose and spur). Now, let's look at the furniture in this room. First of all, we have a beautiful Venetian-style bed and canopy dating 1600; a chest of drawers of the same style and period on the left with above it a Crucifix of the Umbrian School dating 1300 and a Table of the same School dating 1400; a chest frontal dated 1600 and a beautiful wardrobe of the 16th Century, flanked by a fireplace proportionate to the room. All the fireplaces that we shall see in the castle were built in the 16th Century for domestic purposes. Looking up we can admire a delicate, yet simple frieze representing winged cherubs standing on shelves that support festoons, whose central motif is the Orsini coat of arms. This frieze terminates in a wide fascia bearing paintings of some yellow roses and balls placed alternately and equidistant from one another.

Umberto I Room

Orsini coat of arms

Room 4 — called the Triptych Room

This room takes its name from two remarkable altar-pieces of the Umbrian School (1540) belonging to a triptych and depicting the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, a Crucifix, the Madonna and St. John and a bordered Table of the 16th Century. Unfortunately, the third, central and most important altar-piece was never found. Until a few years ago, a wooden crucifix of the Giotto School — which someone attributed to Cimabue — was used in its place, however this work was considered too important and later transferred to a secure place in Rome. Therefore, Triptych remains just a mere name for the room.

At the far end is a clerical cabinet decorated with paintings and tondi and the Facchinetti coat of arms; resting on it are some pewter works dated 1600 and 1700. The part above the door and the chest frontal are both decorated with the family coat of arms and a partly-restored marble bas-relief. Two Tables adorn the room: one depicts the Martyr of St. Sebastian, patron saint of Bracciano, whilst the other a Lady of the Sienese School. One should note the particular gilt background, so typical of this School (1300). The fireplace is flanked by two chests dated 1500, which served a dual purpose and were used exclusively by women. Clothes and linen were kept in them and when closed they acted as seats, since the chairs were usually for the men. Also adorning the room are four candelabra, two wrought-iron and two wooden, a cabinet and three chairs. The ceiling is similar to the previous room except for the frieze, which ends in a chiaroscuro decoration.

Room 5 — the Pisanello Room

Named after Pisanello due to the frescos decorating the frieze that is attributed to his School. The centre of the wall opposite the fireplace (larger than the others yet in proportion with the room) bears the Odescalchi coat of arms encircled by family portraits (1600-1700) including Pope Innocent XI, who raised his relatives to princes.

There is a portrait of him together with a marble medallion. This room holds a collection of numerous pottery works of various schools, uses and eras (1400-1700). There are large jugs that were used in the pharmacies to prepare herbal teas and brews; stoups for kneeling stools and various plates, also with the family coat of arms. Two large chests, 1800, adorn the fireplace. Completing the furnishings are a beautiful wrought-iron chandelier, 1700, and six wooden chairs with the same pattern of the five-petalled Orsini rose. The door in the background leads to the inner courtyard of the castle.

But let's take another look at the beautiful paintings on display. The frescos in the frieze, divided into panels by small, fluted pillars, should belong to the Pisanello era considering the detail of the clothes, the elongated figures and the voluminous turban-shaped hats. So much so that this room is called the Pisanello Room, as mentioned earlier.
Bearing in mind the fact that this painter died in 1455, about thirty years prior to Napoleone Orsini building the castle, and considering the similarity between the floral fascias and those of Antoniazzo in the other rooms, we should agree that among the band of assistants brought to Bracciano by Antoniazzo, there must have been one painter strongly influenced by Pisanello's style.

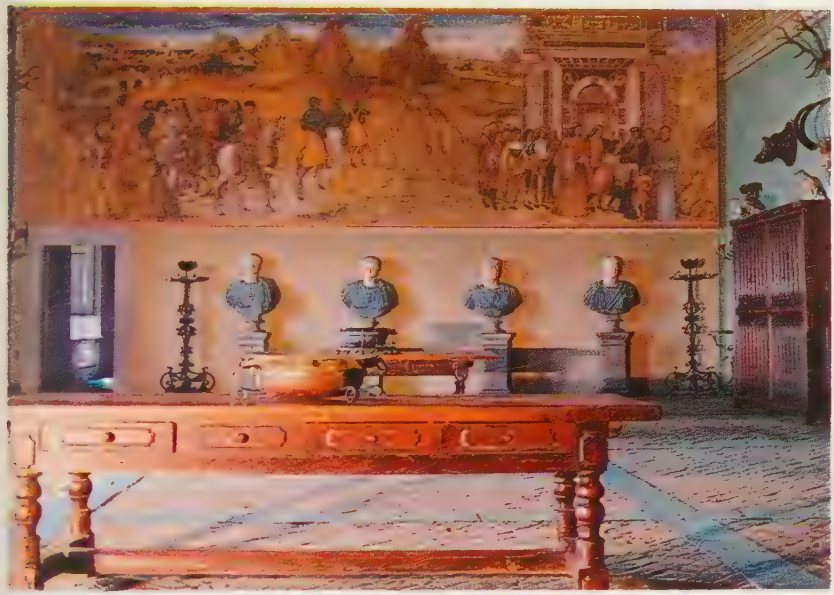
The frieze shows scenes of games, mythology and witty comic episodes. Reproduced in one of the panels is the Sepali Fountain in Viterbo, with a young girl dipping her hands in the water and telling a youth to follow suit (Fountain of Youth). The scene with the inscription "Proserpina" is somewhat bizarre: a man affectionately rests his left arm on a woman's shoulder and at her feet is a cask bearing the inscription "Tronus Pluti". A scene of palmistry depicts six women in lively conversation and engrossed in the reading of hands and playing dice, perhaps a way of telling the future. Various scenes refer to everyday life on the lake where young women are bathing, playing instruments and singing in a boat protected by a thick curtain. Among the mythological scenes, one shows Diana with a dog and three maidservants chasing a wild-boar and a hare; another scene depicts the Muses and in front of them a man dressed as a jester, with the inscription "Marsia", playing a flute and beating a tambourine with his right hand. This sad figure of Marsia dressed up like a Renaissance jester has a strange comic air to it. The scene following is difficult to interpret: three women encounter two men with a flag bearing the Orsini coat of arms. A scene with the inscription "Ziolita amazonum regina", depicts a cart with six women lavishly dressed seated in it and a maidservant holding the horses' reins. Other scenes prevalently with women can be viewed on the wall near the window. One shows a game of chess: below it lies the inscription "Semiranis Asiriorum regina".

Room 6 — Hall of Hunting Trophies

This used to be the largest room in the castle, 15 metres in height and comprising two floors. Today, it is covered by a beautiful, modern ceiling imitating the antique. The walls above bear hunting trophies such as the stuffed heads of Norwegian reindeer, Yugoslavian and Italian deer, fallow-deer, wildboar, mouflon, ibex, woodgrouse, a royal falcon and two specimens of vultures, now almost extinct. In place of the ceiling there once was a gallery running along the entire North wall towards the lake and during banquets, court jesters and musicians would assemble here to entertain the guests.

An array of busts of the twelve Caesars starting with Caius Julius Caesar, are positioned along three of the room's walls. These works are peculiar in that the heads are made of marble, the busts of Renaissance peperino and the bases of wood — indeed an original combination. Next on view is a massive Gothic wardrobe and in the middle of the room are two 16th Century tables, four chandeliers each with eight candles, a culverin and a small 16th Century light gun with the Odescalchi coat of arms engraved on its cartridge chamber.
This is just an advance showing of the castle's weapons, which will be the main subject of our visit to the floor above. At the end of the room, in a corner near the fireplace, stands a pillory. This gruesome yet curious object was made of iron and the condemned person was locked in it and displayed to the public; usually, his offence was written either on or near his person.

He then had to stay almost bare of clothing, in a bent position, and suffer the abuse and insults and have things thrown at him. He had to take care not to lean on the iron because in winter it got icy cold and in the heat it became scorching. The expression "Put in the pillory" is still used today to mean expose one to ridicule.



Hall of Hunting Trophies

Hall of Hunting Trophies: culverin, piece of artillery in bronze with the Orsini coat of arms

Triptych Room

We cannot leave this room without admiring the beautiful fresco that occupies the entire wall, considered one of the castle's treasures because it was found in another site under a layer of whitewash. In fact, this huge fresco (11 metres by 3.95 metres) with scenes of the life of Gentil Virginio, was originally positioned on the right wall of the entrance hall with its barrel vault — which we shall see at the end of the visit — corresponding to the outer wall of the preceding room containing the collection of pottery works.

This painting commemorates two particularly important episodes in the life of Gentil Virginio: the left part shows the triumphant cavalcade to Bracciano with Gentil Virginio leading his troops on the 20th October 1489, after having received from Ferdinando d'Aragona his appointment to Chief Captain of the Aragonese troops; the right part depicts the young Piero de' Medici on his visit to Bracciano in November 1487, on the occasion of his coming to Rome for his sister Maddalena's wedding to Franceschetto Cibo, the son of Innocent VIII. Doctor Anna Cavallaro of the University of Rome's History of Art Institute, gives us a commendable summary: "The two scenes evolve without any sign of continuity in a grand mountainous landscape alluding to the territory of Bracciano.

However, the theme stands out clearly on account of the different and contrasting environments of the two episodes. The meeting between Piero de' Medici (then a sixteen-year-old and similar in appearance to his portraits and description of his contemporaries)

and his uncle Gentil Virginio takes place in a smaller area than the wide expanse depicted in the left scene; however, a few basic elements create that cultured, elegant air of court life. Note the classical front of the building decorated with friezes in the background. This type of architecture is not present anywhere in the actual castle and was certainly created to underline the importance of the meeting and give the scene a noble air.
A group scene of the Orsini family all in cerimonial dress: behind Virginio we can recognize Cardinal Cosimo Orsini, titular of Saints Nereo and Achilleo and the young Carlo Orsini, Virginio's son, accompanied by a Moorish page.

The cavalcade scene takes place in a wide landscape not exactly true to the Bracciano territory, neither geographically nor geologically, just presenting the most characteristic features: at the extreme left we can see Lake Bracciano with a view of Anguillara and its famous towers and, on the opposite banks, there is a harbour with boats anchored which could be likened to Trevignano. Above the hills we can see (or rather could have seen in the photographs taken prior to the painting being torn) forts and castles referring to the feuds of Gentil Virginio Orsini. Of particular interest is the building with cylindrical towers, crowned with battlements and situated in the centre of the painting, which is recognized as being the oldest view of Bracciano Castle in its original site high up on a basaltic cliff.

The corpulent figure of Gentil Virginio Orsini advances on horseback at the head of a compact group of knights and preceded by three soldiers armed with long, gilt lances. The leader wears leather armour with gilt arabesques and holds the iron mace indicating his rank of Chief Captain; on his head is the typical Neapolitan cap and around his neck hangs the gold chain of the Ermine insignia awarded him by Ferdinando d'Aragona in 1463.

Following is a three row line-up of Orsini's court members, in order of importance: young pages and knights dressed in fancy armour bearing mottoes and figures, giving a rich example of the military costumes of that period. Dressed in a typical toga worn by pages (short, gathered tunic, open at the sides and sleeveless, with an embroidered motto praising virtue) is a handsome figure of a swarthy knight standing out from the group on the extreme left: this is presumed to be the Umbrian "condottiere" Bartolomeo d'Alviano, a supporter and relative of Orsini.

Partial view of the Mediaeval centre with Odescalchi Castle towering above ➤➤

Room 7 — the Orsini Room

Named out of respect for the family who built the castle and most of all, for the coats of arms, characters and events relating to this powerful, noble family.
On display here are two splendid marble busts, one by the famous Bernini and the other by the same School, depicting Paolo Giordano II and Isabella Appiani of Piombino. At the sides are two portraits on canvas: Isabella de' Medici and her husband Paolo Giordano I; at the back (in a smaller painting) is their son Virginio Orsini, known as the Grand Lord of Italy. We can also admire a characteristic Florentine wedding chest of the 14th Century, wherein the bride kept her trousseau and which was usually engraved with the couple's coat of arms. Some beautiful pieces of pottery are on display in a glass cabinet. At the top centre is an Hispano-Moresque plate with a metallic gloss finish and flanking it are two plates from Faenza.
The middle shelf displays a storied plate from Urbino with two plates from Casteldurante at its sides. At the bottom centre we can see a very original, huge container from Deruta bearing the Orsini Bear and the family coat of arms, testimony of a union by marriage. A stucco cornice in front of the window is witness to two weddings between the Medici and Orsini families: the first was between Clarice Orsini and Lorenzo de' Medici and the second between Isabella de' Medici and Paolo

Orsini Room

Giordano Orsini I. A beautiful stucco cornice can be viewed between the two busts, enclosing the exclusive coat of arms of the Orsinis, and on the cornice are symbols of a star (Peretti), balls (Medici) and a rose (Orsini). Two more busts — one bronze and the other marble — of the Orsini Cardinals complete the furnishings and are placed in the corners of the room. The frescos of the frieze are missing from this room.

Room 8 — the Lion Room

This room is characterized by a wooden lion, in 16th Century Gothic style, resting on a chest (1300) that acted as a coffer and had a unique lock to it. Above the fireplace is a mirror of huge dimensions, considering the period, made from a plate of silver hammered and smoothed. Although it gave a deformed image, it created an enormous mirrored surface, which was quite a feat for those times (1500). At the far end of the room is a 17th Century cabinet used for underwear.

The ceiling dates to the late 16th Century, the period when Gentil Virginio Orsini supervised some building works, and is richly decorated with an elegant cornice of caryatids at equidistant intervals and intermingled with cupids and bears holding the Orsini coat of arms. In the centre of the room, we can admire a 15th Century table and on top rests a special plate or almoner used for the Church collection. These plates were made of metal so that the clink of coins could be distinctly heard and the donor felt urged to give bigger denominations of coins. This room also displays a chest frontal covered in leather and depicting four biblical events.

Also on view here are a German wedding chest in oak, a Table of the Venetian School dating to the late 15th Century and depicting St. Anthony of Padua and a Holy Bishop, and some 15th Century paintings of Saints Bernardine and Clare and Saints Francis and Anthony.

Room 9 — the Red Room or Isabella's Room

This room was so named because of the ancient red tapestries covering the walls, which were made in the Bracciano factory established by the Orsinis. We have already mentioned the terrible trap and, according to legend, the control mechanism was situated right here in this room.

The trap consisted of a hole with sharp blades embedded in the walls and whoever fell into it was cut to death. Legend has it that the trap was placed in a small corridor linking the two wings of the castle, namely the Red Room and the area that is now private.

This room is furnished in the Venetian style (1600) though much richer and more ornate than that seen in the second room. The ceiling, which is the original one and still intact, is worth particular attention together with the beautiful frieze. Once again we shall resort to a full and detailed description by Borsari, the 19th

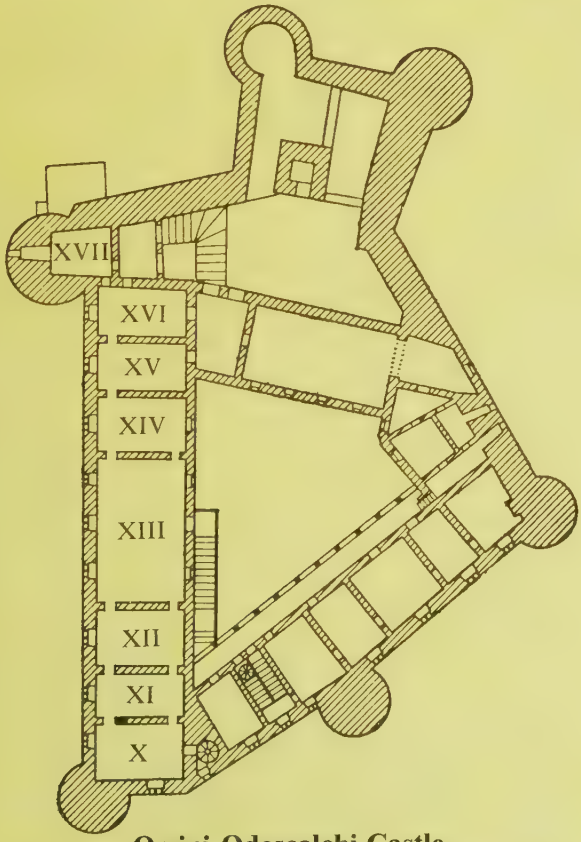
Century historian and writer: "The elegant lacunar-ceiling of strong wooden beams dates back to the late 15th Century. This ceiling was covered over by a second one during the restorations carried out under Virginio and Paolo Giordano II. The beams and sunken panels are painted in tempera and bear red, white and grey traces.
The base of the panels are decorated with the Orsini monogram, while the beams have the Orsini coat of arms in the centre and rest on large, carved shelves also decorated with the same blazon.

Above, running along the walls, is a very elegant frieze painted in fresco and composed of a finely-done ornamental motif of entwining palm and acanthus leaves. These decorations illustrate the painter's rather uncommon skill.

Red Room or Isabella's Room

Halfway down the wall, the Orsini coat of arms appears again in the frieze held up by two bears, though the eel is missing in the horizontal band. Evidence that the room's decoration — attributed to Antoniazzo's group of assistants — was carried out prior to 1492, that is before Gentil Virginio acquired the feud of Anguillara. Paolo Giordano had the room furnished especially for his bride Isabella de' Medici, who died tragically by her husband's doing at Cerruto Guidi in Tuscany. Instead, the Toledo coat of arms (a chess board) belongs to Eleonora Toledo, Isabella de' Medici's mother. The grotesques and paintings adorning the vault, by Taddeo Zuccari, relate the story of Cupid and Psyche; the lunette in front of the window shows a "Bathing Venus". When Vittorio Emanuele III was a guest in the castle he slept in this room.

From the Red Room, which ends our visit of the first floor, we take the staircase up to the open gallery that joins the second floor.



Orsini-Odescalchi Castle
Map of the 2nd Floor

Second Floor

Room 10 — the Balcony Room

As already mentioned, the lacunar ceilings in this series of rooms are not the originals but partly restored and partly redone towards the end of the 19th Century. However, the Odescalchis have faithfully put the Orsini coat of arms on the girders and capitals in honour of the family that built the castle. A balcony overlooks the park, the hanging gardens (once the defence bastions) and Bracciano. On display in the room is a very valuable casket, an example of Lombardic art, inlaid with ivory and decorated in many colours, and used for jewels and documents. This casket is composed of many tiny drawers, each with a different lock and in the centre, a little hinged shutter hides three, small secret drawers even harder to get to, for the safekeep of precious or compromising items.

Room 11 — the Gothic Room

It is so called on account of its furnishings in imitation Gothic, comprising a bed, chest of drawers and bedside tables and a beautiful fireplace. A unique hour glass completes the furniture.

Room 12 — the Hercules Room

Owing to the frieze in fresco depicting "Hercules and his load" and other episodes from the hero's life, done by Antoniazzo Romano and his pupils.

Room 13 — the Armoury Room

It is directly above the Hall of Hunting Trophies and the ceiling is still the original one. Displayed in this vast hall are various Mediaeval arms, such as a complete armour for jousting, 15th Century Milanese manufacture, and two 16th Century German armour for jousting in the Maximillian style.

Room 14 — Room of the Sciences

Owing to a frieze bearing allegories namely: Grammar, Arithmetic, Rhetoric, Dialectics, Geometry, Music and Astronomy. Most of this has been repainted.

Room 15 — Room of the Sicilian Bed

Because at one side of the room is a beautiful bed with a lavish canopy. It is 18th Century in style and also called the Crucifix Room, after a valuable painting that once stood in the middle of a Triptych — the doors of which are in Room 4. Also on view are a small, oriental, gilt wood and bone casket (16th C.) and a characteristic wrough-iron dumb-waiter of the 15th Century.

Room 16 — the Etruscan Room

Because of the numerous objects, in glass cabinets, coming from Caere Vetus, nearby Cerveteri and Alsium, that is Palo Laziale by the sea, just a few kilometres from Bracciano.

Room 17 — the Tower Room

This is of little importance. An exit on the right of this room leads us to the Loggia where we shall begin our interesting tour along the paths of the sentry patrol.

Gothic Room

Armoury Room

Room of the Sicilian Bed

Etruscan Room

Tour of the sentry patrol

This tour takes in the five cylindrical towers on the castle's boundaries and a sixth half-standing that belongs to the oldest part of the demolished "Prefetti Fortress". The circular panorama enjoyed from here is breathtaking: the whole of Lake Bracciano and Vicarello, Trevignano and Anguillara, Mounts Sabini and Mount Soratte in the East, part of the Mediaeval village; towards the West, another part of the Mediaeval village and the modern town. Now let's walk along the paths where, at one time, the soldiers performed their sentry patrol and guard duties.

The first parapet overlooks the barrel vaulted arch, which until 1966, preserved Antoniazzo's huge fresco that was seen in the Hall of Hunting Trophies. It occupied the right wall where the door and window now stand. Remember the letter written by Maestro Antoniazzo to Gentil Virginio requesting him to erect the scaffolding straightaway so that his band of sixty odd pupils and assistants could get on with the painting before the winter set in. Originally, this arch stood just as we see it now.

Sentry patrol and lookout loggia

At the end of the first patrol path, we go up some steps and facing the lake we can view another hanging garden below, the only one on this side, called the noble garden. Up to the 16th Century, this garden served as a cemetery, later it was transformed into a beautiful Italian garden by the architect Del Duca, a pupil of Michelangelo. There were ornamental fountains and plays of water, statues of various sizes, well-designed hedges like a maze or in geometrical patterns, benches and tables with an enchanting view of the lake, then more sculptures of tufaceous or volcanic rock. Today, all that remains to be seen are three beautiful cedars of Lebanon which must be a few centuries old. Now we shall continue along the right, leaving below us the ancient Prefetti Fortress, and stop in a very wide square. From here we can appreciate the grandeur of the castle and its five towers. Lying on the left of the steps of the first tower (overlooking the village) is the so-called lookout point guarding the castle's main entrance. As mentioned earlier, the sentry patrol follows the fortified walls surrounding the castle, linking the lower squares of the towers that protected the artillery.

The tower overlooking Bracciano contained the old prison, which we shall speak about on our descent from the towers. From this side we can get a very good view of the ancient village of the Prefetti of Vico with the church of St. Stephen, Bracciano Cathedral and behind it the "La Sentinella" ramparts, which cannot be seen because it is covered by the houses. The old entrance to the castle stood at the base of this tower prior to the extension work carried out by Napoleone and Gentil Virginio Orsini. Past the second tower, we move towards the area of Piazza Mazzini and Piazza 1° Maggio. From here one can get a clear idea of the second boundary wall and the site of the drawbridge that once stood where the square is today. Going past the third and fourth tower, we come next to the North side that overlooks the entrance and the lake.

Let's turn our attention again to the marvellous circular panorama enjoyed from this point: a serene and relaxing landscape, so sweet and green and in harsh contrast with the terrible stories that we heard took place inside the castle. We come to the main tower or ravelin. The corbel projection opens out into three embrasures to guard each side. A beautiful loggia was built on the tower, with arches resting on small pillars of calcareous rock. At the tower exit we can view once again the remains of the Italian garden; descending ten steps we come to the point where our tour of the sentry patrol commenced and, therefore, within the ancient Prefetti Fortress. The historical introduction told us that this Mediaeval fortress dates to the 12th Century; it was and still is a square-based structure joined at one corner to the more modern, quadrangular construction. The four towers were square and, at the centre, they protected the keep standing a good ten metres higher, as can be seen in a fresco existing in a private room of the castle, the work of Zuccari. The right side of an area on the ground floor leads us into a long room, long-since opened, which was once part of the manor of the ancient lords of Bracciano.

Panorama from the southern tower

Sentry patrol towards the East

Monumental kitchen - the fireplace

Monumental kitchen - Detail of utensils of that period

Monumental kitchen - Detail of utensils of that period

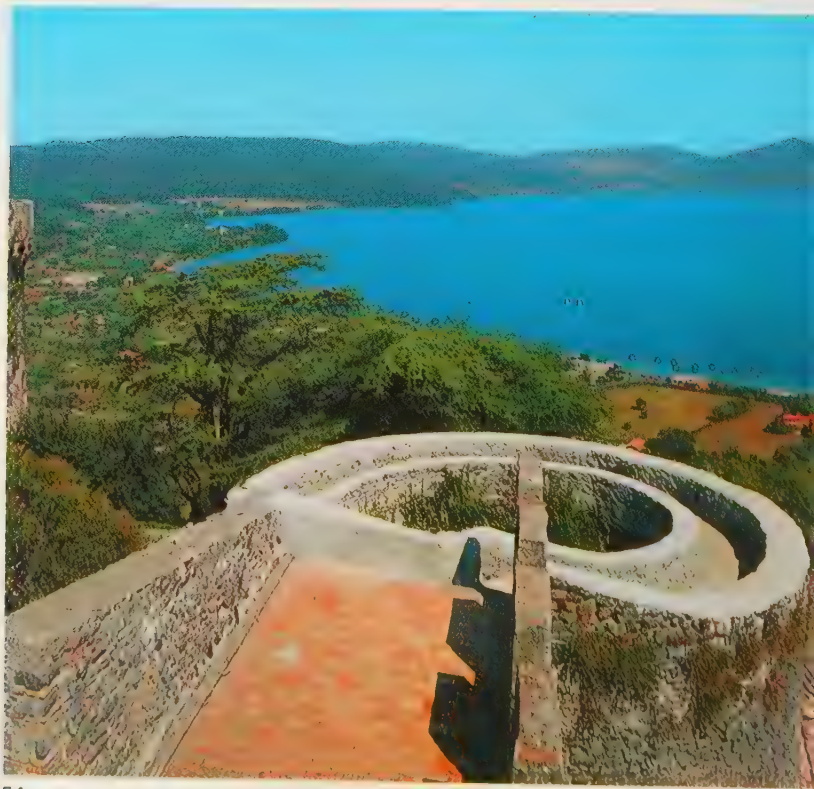
At the sides of this room are two spaces where the remains of stairs can be seen, which must have led to the upper rooms. Here too, there were deposits of arms, prisons and torture rooms conveniently positioned away from the apartments. Passing under a small arch in tufaceous rock and descending the steps, we come to a hall and from here to the triangular-shaped courtyard forming the inner court. The main side displays a double row of porticos with brick arches resting on octagonal pillars of basaltic rock, surmounted by elegant capitals bearing the Orsini coat of arms. These porticos were once walled up and used as rooms and only in the late 19th Century, under Prince Don Baldassarre Odescalchi, did they take on their present form. This change was the work of Architect Francesco di Giorgio Martini. Situated at the tip of the triangle, on the North side, is a huge outer staircase leading to the rooms on the second floor, which we have just visited.
A big cistern lies on the last side of the courtyard and on its right is one of the most characteristic rooms of the castle, namely the ancient kitchen. On entering, the impact is tremendous: these kitchens are made up of four, huge chimneys and two areas divided by massive, basaltic pillars with rounded corners ending in a cornice and borders curving downwards like an owl's beak.

And resting on these are segmental arches of brick. Whole, fresh carcasses were cooked over fires on the ground in the centre of the chimney cowl. In fact, adjacent to this area is a slaughter house with a sink fed by the outer cistern; the blood and water flowed into a trapdoor and then into a waste pit. Every day, meals were cooked here for about three hundred people, but for celebrations this number would increase to a thousand, as was the case when Marcantonio Colonna come here after the victorious Battle of Lepanto, which lasted eleven days and eleven nights nonstop.

Situated in front of the portico side are a series of seven rooms closed to the public and reserved as private homes of the princes. They have barrel vaulted ceilings decorated with stucco cornices and preserve many art works, amongst which are a 15th Century Table of the Ferrara School depicting "Ecce Homo"; a portrait in oils of Lorenzo Carnaro, Procurator of St. Mark, dated mid-15th Century; six oil paintings of the Jacopo da Bassani School showing pastoral and farming scenes and a Table in Giovanni Bellini's style with a figure of Christ Blessing.

At the end of the visit, we descend from the courtyard towards the castle exit and then into Piazza Mazzini, leaving slightly confused these ancient, picturesque sites with their rooms so austere and deserted, yet still so full of life and memories.

Sentry patrol and panorama of the lake



The surroundings of Bracciano

Lake Bracciano or "Sabatinus Lacus", is the second-largest in the Lazio region and, like all lakes in this area, is volcanic in origin. It is circular in shape with a circumference of about 30 kms. and its entire perimeter is skirted by a road that runs through Bracciano, Trevignano and Anguillara.
Its surface area is 57.47 sq. kms. The lake waters are abundant in fish, which are fully exploited by the local restaurants and trattorias.
Situated on the lake are the ancient Vicarello Thermal Springs, which are now closed and awaiting restructuring, then come Trevignano and Anguillara.
We mentioned before that the lake boat "Sabazia" takes in these three towns departing from Bracciano.

Trevignano

Picturesque Trevignano lies 42 kms. from Rome and 13 kms. from Bracciano. It stands dominating from a basaltic rock over the lake and the fertile countryside of fruit and vegetable orchards. The town completely overlooks the lake with its shady

The lake boat Sabazia II.

avenues of secular plane trees, forming a backdrop against the gardens and the square facing the Town Hall, which displays a remarkable 15th Century portico.
Beneath this portico lies the entrance to Trevignano's small, Etruscan Museum, where some well-preserved relics confirm the town's Etruscan origins. In fact, during the construction of new buildings excavations were carried out in different periods bringing to light some archeological pieces dating to the 6th Century B.C. The remains of an Etruscan necropolis were discovered in the locality of "Olivetello".
The museum is open every day to visitors and permission to enter may be obtained either from a policeman or the Commune Office.
The Church of St. Catherine next door to the Town Hall was erected within the walls of an ancient Roman temple, remains of which can be seen in a reticulated work in black flint.
It is interesting to visit the Collegiate Church where frescos of the Raffaello School are preserved (Transit and Coronation of Mary); as well as a 12th Century, Byzantine Triptych on Table showing "Christ on the Throne, the Madonna and St. John the Evangelist".

Trevignano Romano: view from the Borgia Fortress ruins

The little town's landscape is distinguished by the ruins of the Orsini Fortress that dominate the built-up area. In 1496, the castle was destroyed by the Borgias, by order of Giovanni Borgia.
As previously mentioned, the town's Etruscan origins have been reconfirmed by the recent findings of a necropolis in the area of Olivetella. (At the town entrance coming from Bracciano). Perhaps, this used to be the Etruscan town of "Sabate", which, according to legend, was submerged by the lake in flood.
Together with the previously stated relics, in one tomb two hen's eggs were found in a small vessel and scattered on the ground were shells of other eggs, some a bit bigger probably of geese. At first this just seems curious, but it has a complex, religious and historical meaning recalling the symbolic and magical conception of the egg diffused throughout the East and Greece: the egg symbolizes life and birth; to the Phoenicians, Egyptians and Hindus — followers of Orpheus — the belief is that the sun, world and the Creator of the universe were born from the egg. Evidence of a link between these beliefs lies in the ostrich egg fragments found in the Gezer tombs and the whole eggs discovered in the Egyptian tombs. Thus, the Trevignano findings are doubly significant, for the findings themselves and the fact they document transitions in culture: the world of the Etruscans is even more enlightened by the civilizations that flourished on the opposite shores of the Mediterranean.

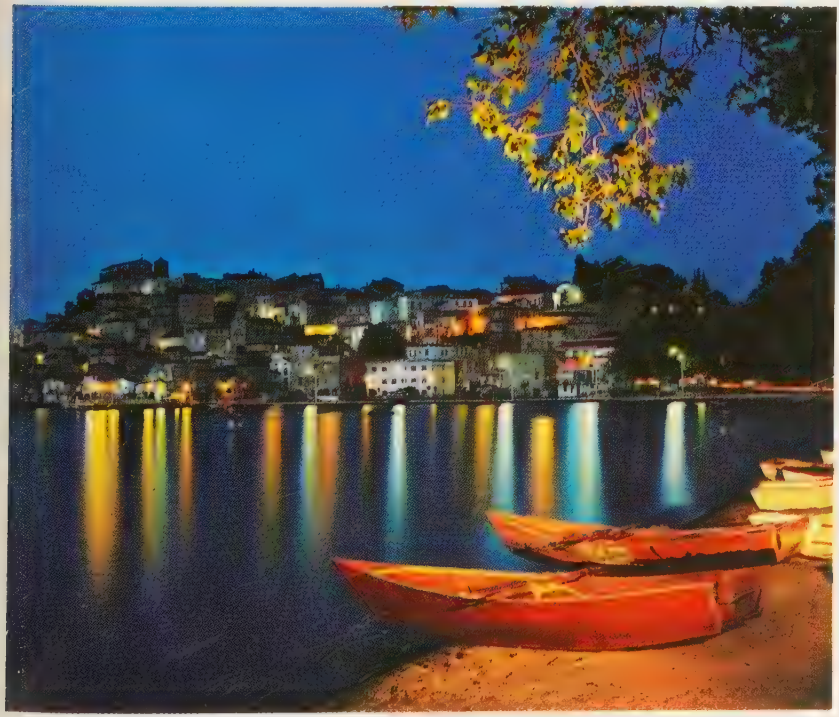
Trevignano Romano: panorama of the lake

Trevignano Romano: Via Quattro Novembre and Piazza Vittorio Emanuele

Anguillara

Anguillara lies about 11 kms. away from Trevignano if you continue your tour of the lake. Instead, if you want to got to Rome, you must turn right along the Bracciano Road, 13 kms. before arriving at Bracciano (27 kms. from Rome).
To the tourist, the town is truly a beautiful sight high up on a promontory overlooking the lake. Maybe, Anguillara gets its name from an ancient Roman villa called "Angularia", because it was erected right where the coast forms a right angle. The town's history was linked for many centuries with the Anguillara family and the very first information dates to the 11th Century. Later, the possessions passed to the Orsinis (in 1492) when Anguillara lived one of the most dramatic pages of its history. At that time Pope Alexander VI Borgia was in power and the Orsinis, in exchange for having favoured the entrance of Charles VIII's French troops into the Papal territories, were obliged to fight against Duke Valentino who was under the Pope's orders. In the hope of a better existence, the inhabitants of Anguillara opened their gates to the Church troops who were later defeated. As a punishment, all the inhabitants were exiled and only after long negotiations with the Orsinis was their return granted. That day the people made a solemn vow to the Madonna before the same image that is today preserved in the Collegiate Church.

Anguillara Sabazia: night



Anguillara Sabazia: characteristic glimpse in the Mediaeval quarter

In 1693, the feudal possessions were sold to Francesco Grillo and later, inherited normally by the Neapolitan family of the Dukes of Eboli. In 1872, the name "Sabazia" was added, taken from the lake's ancient name.

There are very few visible remains of its history and Mediaeval buildings, however, reigning supreme are the enchanting azure lake and the customary kindness shown by its people.
The beautiful 16th Century gate, forming the entrance to the town, opens onto a belvedere with a magnificent view of the lake. At the centre of the balustrade is a pretty fountain decorated with eel symbols, the work of Ignazio Iacometti.
In fact, folklore has it that the town's name is derived from eel fishing, owing to their abundance in the lake.
In front of the belvedere stands the Town Hall, which is rather old just like the massive, cylindrical Fortress Keep that once served as the prison. Via Umberto I leads to the Collegiate Church. The presbytery delicated to the Virgin Mary bears sculptures by Ignazio Iacometti.
Walking through the maze of picturesque Mediaeval alleys you can get some splendid glimpses of the lake, alternating with other views of the luxuriant vegetation on the surrounding hillsides.

Anguillara Sabazia: Fisherman's Monument and a view of the lake

Vigna di Valle — Airforce History Museum

Historically speaking, the every first Italian Airforce event took place over Lake Bracciano.
In fact, on the 3rd October 1908, the first airship, the N1, took to the air from the South bank of the lake. Three years later, this model was employed in the Libyan War bringing about the birth of Italian Aviation.
For over fifty years, Lake Bracciano has played a leading role in the Airforce, first with the airships then the seaplanes.
The recent founding of the Airforce History Museum, situated near the Vigna di Valle Airport and officially opened by the President of the Republic on the 24th May 1977, could be taken as a lack of thought for the history of the airforce on the part of past generations of airmen. On the other hand, there were great difficulties to overcome. In 1933, ten years after the founding of the Airforce as an armed force, the exhibits on display at Castel Sant'Angelo were transferred to the Lower Battery barracks along the River Tevere. In 1939, they were again moved to a more suitable site on the Lungotevere delle Vittorie. During and after the Second World War, many of the historical pieces were lost. From 1950 onwards, the years of reconstruction, the idea of an Airforce History Museum began to re-emerge. After various attempts including economic problems, the choice fell upon Vigna di Valle owing to its alrealdy existing structures.
The significance of a History Museum, apart from being an institution in general, is to testify how much progress human ability has achieved in the course of history from Leonardo to our present day.
The History Museum at Vigna di Valle houses in three spacious hangars original aircraft, prototypes and reclics from the pioneer era to the present day. At the entrance, visitors can admire the reconstruction of Leonardo's Flying Machine, with "steps to go up and to dismount". The collection comprises eighty odd aeroplanes, including Garnerin's balloon and the CANT Z 506B, a three-engined seaplane of the Thirties.

Vigna di Valle: aerial view of the Airforce History Museum

Vicarello Thermal Springs

The Apollinaris Thermal Springs of Vicarello are situated between Bracciano and Trevignano, on a hill covered will olive trees. The Grand Hotel of the Springs can be glimpsed after the turrets of the Acqua Paola aqueduct that runs across the Roman countryside, passing under Mount Rocca Romana, the highest and most wooded of the surrounding mounts, close to the Vicarello Baths among the ruins and Roman villas. Its sulphureous waters remind us how much material was extracted from the earth during excavation and construction work on the Thermal Springs in the 19th Century. This is the famous Aurelian Water of Apollinaris, also cited in Antonino's detailed Guidebook.

The nature of the site and surroundings is truly beautiful, as always is with volcanic zones next to thermal springs. The road snakes up half along the coast and half amidst the olive groves, chestnut and oak trees, with the vineyards set panoramically below overlooking the lake.
Both the Thermal Springs and Hotel are closed at present, awaiting an overall rearrangement of the area.

The "Vicarello Thermal Springs" Hotel bulding

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